MAHAFFEY

Mac Gille Chathbhaidh

The Incredible Origin of the Surname and the Bloodline

KELLECHAFFE · the Chapel of Cathbad · the rock above Loch Ryan

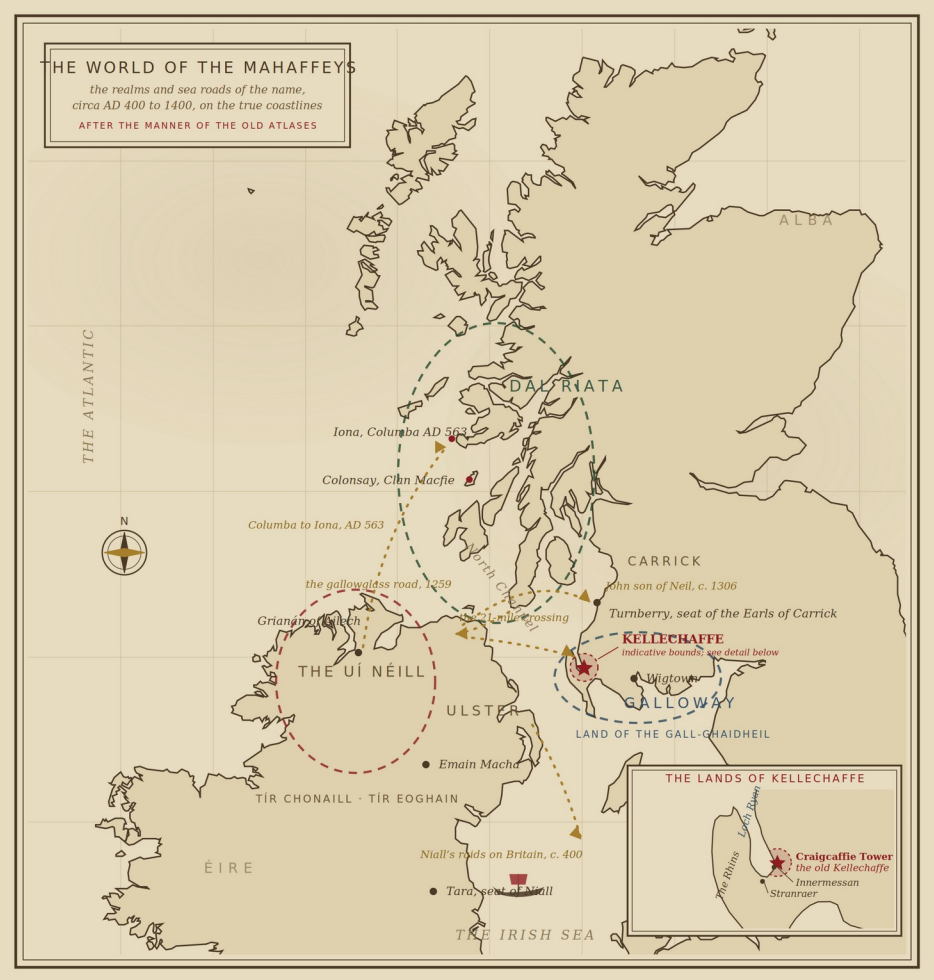
Prepared for the children of this line, and for their children, that they may know what they carry.

Foreword: How This Family Tells Its Story

Every family has stories. Few families have receipts. This paper holds itself to a rule: every claim in it is marked for what it is. Where a fact is **documented**, a source is cited and, where one exists, a link is given so you can read it yourself. Where a claim is **tradition**, it is called tradition. Where a claim is **legend**, it is called legend, because legends matter too, but a family that tells the truth about itself owns its history outright, and no one can ever take it away.

What follows is the story of a single word, the name Mahaffey, and of the people who carried it: from a forgotten saint on a rock above a Scottish sea loch, through the charter hand of Robert the Bruce, through the axe-bearing sea lords of the Norse-Gaelic world, through persecution, exile, and an ocean crossing, to the American frontier, the American Revolution, and the men and women who serve the United States today. The remarkable thing about this story is not how much of it is legend. The remarkable thing is how much of it is real.

Frontispiece: The Map of the Story



A story map in the style of the old Bible atlases, drawn on true survey coastlines (Natural Earth data). Realms of several centuries are shown together and their borders are approximate. In the detail panel, the bounds of Kellechaffe are indicative only; no medieval survey of them survives, though the site itself is fixed by the standing tower. Red marks the family's documented ground.

I. The Name That Remembers a Saint

Mahaffey is one spelling among many. Across seven centuries of parish registers, charters, tax rolls, and ship manifests, the same family name appears as McHaffie, McIlhaffie, MacCaffie, Machaffie, Mahaffie, Mahaffy, Mehaffey, Mahaffee, and Mahaffey. Spelling was fluid; the name was not. Scholars have traced two Gaelic originals behind these forms, and both belong to the same waters.

The first derivation is the one that names our ground. Dr. George F. Black, whose reference work The Surnames of Scotland (1946) remains the standard authority on Scottish names, records the entry MACCAFFIE, MACHAFFIE on page 461. Black notes that the fullest early form of the name, found in a list of

Wigtownshire men preserved in Wodrow's Analecta, is Mackilhaffy. He then gives the meaning [1]:

> *"This represents Mac Gille Chathbhaidh, 'son of the servant of S. Cathbad.' The name is also preserved in the place name Craig Caffie, parish of Inch, which appears in a charter of the time of Robert I as Kellechaffe or Kellechaffy."*
>
> George F. Black, The Surnames of Scotland, p. 461, citing the Register of the Great Seal of Scotland (RMS I, App. II, 616)

Read that again slowly, because it is astonishing. The foremost authority on Scottish surnames states, in print, that this family name means **son of the servant of Saint Cathbad**, and that the same saint's name is written into the land itself at Craigcaffie, in the parish of Inch, beside Loch Ryan near Stranraer, in a charter from the reign of Robert the Bruce.

Be precise about what that means, because it is easy to garble. The family is not named after the rock, and the rock is not named after the family. **They are two names descended in parallel from one source.** The chapel was Cathbad's chapel, so the place became Kellechaffe. The people were Cathbad's servants, so the family became Mac Gille Chathbhaidh. Brother and sister, not parent and child. This is why Black cites the place name as corroboration of the surname rather than as its origin, and it is also why the two forms cannot be anything but connected. Wherever a Mahaffey stands on this earth, the family name and one rock in Galloway are pointing back at the same man.

And you can hear the name wear down. The old Gaelic is pronounced, near enough, mahk GEEL-yuh KHAH-vee, with the ch sounded in the back of the throat as in Scottish loch. Three ordinary changes then stack up. The th, once sounded as in think, weakened across the medieval centuries until it was only a breath, so Cath- became Ca-. The bh is simply a v. And that v hardened to an f in the mouths of Scots and English clerks writing the name down, a shift the Gaelic itself also made, since Black's sources record the parallel form Cathfaidh with the f already in place. KHAH-vee becomes KAH-fee.

Meanwhile the front of the name collapsed. Mac Gille was a mouthful, and Gaelic wore it down without mercy, exactly as it did in other surnames: Mac Gille Eathain became MacLean, Mac Gille Bhràth became MacIlwraith. Here the road runs Mac Gille Chathbhaidh, then Mackilhaffy, then McIlhaffie, then M'Haffie, then Mahaffie, then Mahaffey. Watch the gille syllable die: whole in Black's oldest form, thinned to a single -Il- a century later, gone entirely by the time the family reached America. Say the forms aloud in order and you will hear your own surname fall out of your mouth.

One last piece of grammar explains something that puzzles every descendant: why does the rock keep a hard C when the family does not? In Gaelic a word's opening consonant softens according to what stands before it. Following gille, the saint's name softens to Chathbhaidh, and that breathy opening is what survives as the h in Mahaffey. In the place name the saint sits in a different grammatical position and keeps his hard c, giving Craigcaffie. One saint, two grammatical settings, two consonants. The name and the rock look unalike for a reason, and the reason is a rule of Gaelic.

Black's entry also gives us named individuals: John McCaffe served as a king's messenger in 1540, and the parish lists of 1684 record the forms McHaffine, McIlhaffie, Mahaffie, and Mahalfie among the people of Wigtownshire [1]. The name was, in Black's words, confined mainly to that southwestern corner of Scotland. This was never a name scattered thinly across a nation. It was a name rooted in one district, like a tree.

The second derivation must be stated honestly, because you will encounter it. Many references, including standard surname dictionaries, treat Mahaffy and Mahaffey as anglicizations of Mac Dhuibhshíthe (said roughly mahk ghuv-HEE-uh, which wore down in everyday speech toward mac-a-fee, hence Macfie), "son of Duibhshíth," a personal name built from dubh (black, dark) and síth (peace), the origin of Clan Macfie, with the Irish branch of the name concentrated in County Donegal in Ulster [2][3]. That derivation is real, but it belongs to a different people: the island clan of Colonsay, whose story is told in the note below. The two names collided in English spelling, and the collision has confused surname books ever since. For the family of Galloway and the lands of Kellechaffe, Black's derivation is the one that matches the tradition, the geography, and the documents. The servant of the battle-saint is our reading, and it is the reading with a charter behind it.

A Side Note: Setting the Record Straight on Clan Macfie

Search the name Mahaffey online and nearly every surname site will tell you the same thing: that you are a Macfie, of Clan Mac Dhuibhshíthe, the "dark peace" clan. Mahaffey and Mehaffey do in fact stand on that clan's official roll of associated names [23][25]. But the listing is not the origin, and this note exists so that no Mahaffey ever again has to take a search result's word for it.

Who the Macfies actually are: an ancient Hebridean island clan of Colonsay and Oronsay, seated at the hillfort of Dùn Eibhinn, first on record as Thomas Macdoffy in 1296. They served the MacDonald Lords of the Isles, and by tradition were the hereditary Keepers of the Records of the Isles, the Lordship's scribes; their own clan tradition places them in Siol Alpin, claiming descent from Cináed mac Ailpín and the old kings of Dál Riata. When the

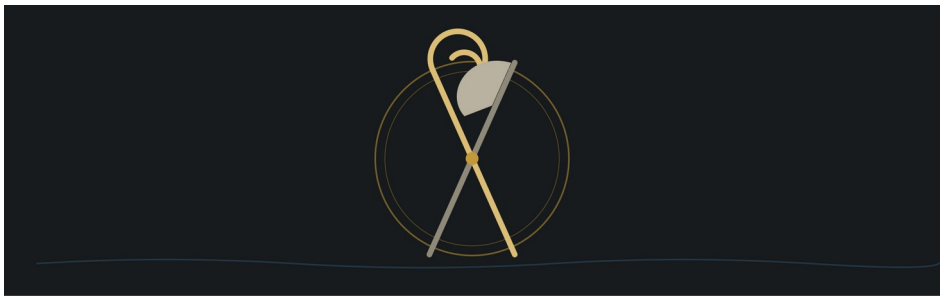
Lordship fell in 1493 their world fell with it. Their last chief, Malcolm Macfie of Colonsay, joined the MacDonald rising of 1615, was hunted down, and was killed on Colonsay in 1623; the clan scattered, and it stood chiefless until the Lord Lyon recognized it as a revived armigerous clan in 1981, with its red, green, and gold tartan recorded on August 29, 1991 [3][23][24][25]. That is an honorable history. It is also not ours.

Why the error persists: when the clan societies and surname dictionaries assembled their rolls in the Victorian era and after, every "-affie" and "-affey" name was swept under the Macfie umbrella because the anglicized forms sound alike, and the roll listing itself is why every search engine repeats the claim to this day. The scholarship says otherwise. Black keeps the names in separate entries: MACFIE and MACDUFFIE are Mac Dhuibhshíthe of the isles; MACCAFFIE and MACHAFFIE are Mac Gille Chathbhaidh of Galloway, the servants of the battle-saint [1]. And surname Y-DNA projects have found that sound-alike name groups in this family of names are genetically distinct families, not one clan [26]. Two different peoples; one unlucky collision of spelling.

What stands: the roll listing is official, so any Mahaffey who wishes may wear the Macfie tartan and stand with that clan at gatherings; association by name is real, honorable, and worth having [24]. But association is not origin. The origin of this family’s name is not the dark-peace clan of the isles. It is the servant of the battle-prophet on the rock above Loch Ryan.

II. Cathbad: The Battle-Prophet

Who was the saint whose servants we were? Here the honest answer is the most haunting one: history kept his name and lost his story.



The crozier and the war axe: in the Age of Saints, one man could be remembered for both.

The name Cathbad (in older Gaelic spellings Cathbhadh, said roughly KAH-vugh, or Cathfaidh, said roughly KAH-fee) is built on cath, the Gaelic word for battle. Say Cathfaidh aloud, KAH-fee, and you are already halfway to Craigcaffie and to the haffey in Mahaffey; the saint’s name has been hiding in

plain sound all along. It is one of the most storied names in all Celtic literature. In the Ulster Cycle, the great cycle of Irish heroic legend, Cathbad is the chief druid of Emain Macha, seer and counselor to King Conchobar mac Nessa, the prophet who foretold the glory and the short life of the boy hero Cú Chulainn. That Cathbad is legend, and we mark him as legend. But his name tells us what the name meant to the Gaels who used it: a battle-seer, a man who stood at the join between war and the otherworld.

Nor was a warrior's name strange on a holy man. In the early medieval Gaelic world the line between the abbey and the war camp was thin, and more than one great saint was a fighting aristocrat before he was a monk. The greatest of the Irish missionary saints, Columba of Iona, who carried the faith across the water into Scotland in the sixth century, was by the traditional genealogies recorded in Adomnán's seventh-century Life of Columba a born prince of the Uí Néill, the royal house of Niall of the Nine Hostages, whose blood will enter this story again in chapter five. A missionary of that age named battle-prophet was not a contradiction. He was the standard model.

When did his cult reach that rock? This is the hardest honest question in the paper, and the answer is that we do not know. Christianity arrived in Galloway remarkably early: Ninian's church at Whithorn, a day's ride away, dates by tradition to about 397, and the surrounding country was thoroughly Christian for some four hundred and fifty years before Gaelic was spoken on that shore [33]. So a chapel could well have stood above Loch Ryan long before the name Kellechaffe existed. But the name itself is Gaelic through and through, cill plus the saint, and Cathbad is an Irish name with no British equivalent, which means one of two things. Either the chapel was founded, or an older chapel was rededicated, in the Gaelic centuries after AD 800, when the Gall-Ghàidheil brought Irish saints and Irish speech to this coast; or an older British holy man was quietly re-identified with a similar-sounding Irish saint, a thing that happened often enough to have a name among scholars. The first is the likelier reading. The second cannot be ruled out.

Which raises the question every descendant eventually asks: what was that crag called before? Here we must simply say that no one knows and no one can know. The older language of Galloway left almost no writing, surviving mostly in place names, and where a name was replaced the earlier layer is gone. But two small consolations are worth having. Nearby names did survive the language change, Loch Ryan and the Rhins among them, so the country was not wiped clean; and the word craig itself belongs to both languages, British and Gaelic alike, descending from a single ancient Celtic root for a rock. The odds are good that the people of that shore were already calling it the crag long before anyone said Craigcaffie. What changed was not the rock, and not the people. What changed was whose rock they said it was.

Does he have a full name? Astonishingly, yes, and it comes from serious academic work. The University of Glasgow's survey Commemorations of Saints in Scottish Place-Names, a Leverhulme-funded project that catalogued some five thousand places and seven hundred and fifty saints across Scotland, holds a record for Craigcaffie. It identifies the saint commemorated in the name as **Cathub mac Fergusa: Cathub, son of Fergus**, filed under a wider grouping of the name forms Cathub and Cathbad, which is the same variation Black's entry preserves [35]. The project rates the identification probable rather than certain, and this paper reports it exactly that way. But probable, from the standard academic survey of Scottish saint place-names, is a very great deal more than nothing. Our saint has a name and a father's name.

That same record confirms, independently of Black and from a different body of evidence, the sequence this family has always told. The Glasgow survey's earliest form of the name is **Killichaffie, attested in 1329**, and its editors note that the modern name has probably taken over from that earlier one, the topographical name displacing the ecclesiastical one at some point before the sixteenth century [35]. The chapel name came first. The rock name came second. They then track the word down the centuries: Cragcaffy in the Wigtownshire Charters of 1536, Karkophy on Blaeu's great atlas of 1654, Craigcoffie on Roy's military survey of 1752, and Craigcaffie today. And the crag itself is no metaphor: the survey identifies it as the hill still marked on maps as the **Fell of Craigcaffie**.

And he is in the calendars. Two of the old Irish martyrologies commemorate him on **April 6**. The Martyrology of Tallaght, among the earliest of all Irish calendars, enters him tersely as Cathub, Bishop. The Martyrology of Donegal, compiled by the Four Masters in the 1630s, gives him in full: Cathur, son of Fergus, Bishop, over Achadh-cinn [36]. Canon O'Hanlon's compilation of the Irish calendars gives his birth as the year **404** and the Chronicon Scotorum records his death in **555**, which places him in the Age of Saints, the generation of Columba. Those two dates sit alongside the marvel usually reported about him, that he lived a hundred and fifty years, and the three figures are plainly not independent of one another: 404 to 555 is a span of a hundred and fifty-one years. Which was calculated from which we cannot say. A birth year may have been reckoned backward from a remembered death and a traditional lifespan, or the lifespan may simply be the difference between two dates already on record. What can be said is that this is one claim wearing three faces, and it should be counted once rather than three times.

Where was his church? The Martyrology of Donegal is named for the house where the Four Masters wrote, not for a region of saints, and it gathers holy men and women from across Ireland, so the calendar itself tells us nothing about his country. But O'Hanlon offers an identification for Achadh-cinn:

probably Aughnakeely, one of the four townlands of Craigs, in the barony of Kilconway, County Antrim [36]. It is offered as a probability and not a certainty, and the standard list of Antrim monastic houses flags that foundation as one that may never have existed at all. We report it as what it is. But if the identification holds, it is worth pausing over, because Kilconway lies on the Antrim coast: the Irish shore that faces Galloway across the same twenty-one miles this whole story keeps crossing. A cult carried from there to the Rhins would be travelling the oldest road in this book. And one caution for every future reader who spots the name and leaps, as any Gallovidian would: this Fergus is not Fergus, Lord of Galloway. That Fergus died in 1161, some six centuries after Cathub. Fergus was among the commonest names in the Gaelic world, borne by the legendary founder of Dál Riata, by a Pictish bishop-saint, and by ten separate saints in the Martyrology of Donegal alone. The echo between our saint's father and Galloway's great lord is an echo of naming tradition, not of blood.

Two further things cling to his name. The seventeenth-century scholar John Colgan suspected that a priest recorded as Fothrath or Cathbad, set over a church at Fothrat, might be the same man, which is the Cathbad form of the name attached directly to a churchman. Colgan also proposed that Cathub belonged among the disciples of Saint Patrick, and on that point O'Hanlon disagreed with him and set the claim aside [36].

Which brings us to a question an alert reader will raise, and this book would rather raise it first. Was the bishop ever a druid? The Ulster Cycle's Cathbad is a chief druid of the same name in the same province, and Irish scribes are known to have taken pagan figures and rewritten them as kings and saints, a practice scholars call euhemerism; the Tuatha Dé Danann are handled that way wholesale in the Book of Invasions. Set beside that, our bishop's dossier has a suggestive shape: the same name, the same province, a lifespan that reaches from before Patrick's mission to the height of the monastic age, and a contested attempt to attach him to Patrick himself. Bridging figures of exactly that kind were useful to a kindred that wanted both a pagan past and a Christian present.

And yet the case cannot be made. No scholarship has established it; Colgan and O'Hanlon argued over whether Cathub was Patrick's disciple, not over whether he was a repurposed druid. The parentage that is sometimes offered as proof runs backwards, since in the tales Cathbad the druid belongs to the older generation, commonly as the father of Conchobar, while Fergus mac Róich is Conchobar's rival and near-contemporary; a Fergus who fathered Cathbad would invert the generations. And cath, battle, was among the commonest elements in Irish names. Two men may carry one name and share

nothing else. So we set the question down as a question, which is the honest place for it, and leave it for a descendant with better sources than ours.

So this is what we can now say. His name was Cathub, son of Fergus. He was a bishop. He died about 555. His feast is the sixth of April. No life of him survives, and we could find no vita. What survives instead is something arguably greater. His chapel gave its name to the land: Killichaffe, then Kellechaffe, from cill, the Gaelic word for a monastic cell or chapel, plus his name, the Chapel of Cathbad. And the families of that land took his name into their own: Mac Gille Chathbhaidh, the sons of the servant of Cathbad.

One coincidence should be cleared away before anyone trips over it: Cathbad has no connection whatever to the word Catholic. Catholic comes from the Greek katholikos, universal. Cathbad comes from Old Irish cath, battle. Different languages, different roots, and the resemblance in English is pure accident. Our saint's name means battle.

In medieval Gaelic naming, the prefix Gille (servant, devotee) was an honor. A family did not name its sons directly after a saint; it placed them under his protection as his servants. And here the obscurity of Cathub becomes the most valuable fact in this chapter. Names of this shape formed from widely venerated saints, Christ and Mary and Patrick and Brigid and Columba, arose independently in many districts from many unrelated men, which is why two families called Gilchrist or Kilpatrick may share no ancestor at all. Cathub was venerated almost nowhere. A parent could only name a child his servant in a place where his cult was alive, and in Scotland that means essentially one district. This is precisely why Black could write that our name is confined mainly to that southwestern corner of Scotland, and why the surname DNA evidence finds these sound-alike names to be separate families [26]. **A common saint would have scattered us. An obscure saint kept us together.**

What such a family actually did has a name in the medieval record. In Ireland, church lands were held in hereditary stewardship by kindreds called airchinneach (erenagh) and comarba (coarb); in Scotland the deòradh were hereditary keepers of a saint's relic, and left behind the surname Dewar. Hereditary custodianship of one saint's ground, passed father to son for generations, was a standard institution and not a romantic guess. It is the likeliest meaning of a gille surname fastened to one obscure saint's chapel. Some men are remembered in books. This man was remembered in people. Every time a Mahaffey signs a check, the signature is his monument.

III. Kellechaffe: The Chapel Lands on Loch Ryan

Stand on the eastern shore of Loch Ryan today, a few miles north of Stranraer, and you are standing on strategic ground that has been watched for well over two thousand years. Loch Ryan opens to the North Channel of the Irish Sea; on a clear day the coast of Ireland is visible from the high ground. Whoever held this shore held one of the great sea doors between Ireland and Scotland. On the rising ground above the old Kellechaffe lands stand the ruins of an Iron Age stone tower, the Teroy broch, raised by the ancient inhabitants centuries before Rome ever touched Britain, and close by lay Innermessan, once the chief settlement of this shore before Stranraer existed [4]. People fortified this ground before the saint came, and after him, and after that.

Craigcaffie Tower, raised by the Neilsons in the 1570s on the lands Robert the Bruce granted. It still stands.

Then comes the moment the family enters written history, and it enters at the very top. In the reign of King Robert I of Scotland, Robert the Bruce, victor of Bannockburn and liberator of the Scottish nation, a royal charter granted the lands of Kellechaffe. The official architectural record of the standing tower states it directly [5]:

> *"Craigcaffie, or Kellechaffe, as it was anciently called, was granted by Robert the Bruce to John, son of Neil, Earl of Carrick, and from him the Neilsons, who built the castle, claimed their descent."*
>
> British Listed Buildings register, Craigcaffie Tower, Category A listing

The earldom of Carrick was the Gaelic house of Robert the Bruce’s own mother, Marjorie, Countess of Carrick, and the old Earl Niall of Carrick was the king’s ancestor on that Gaelic side [6]. Family accounts of the grant, drawing on the index of the lost charters, date it to about 1309, just three years after Bruce seized the crown, and describe John son of Neil as a kinsman of the king who came from across the water to fight for him in the desperate early years of the war of independence, when Bruce was a hunted man and land grants were payment in blood; the same accounts record that John’s two brothers also fought for Bruce and were likewise rewarded with land [7]. Which Neil fathered this John is genuinely uncertain at seven centuries’ distance, and we

say so. What the record establishes beyond argument is this: the lands bearing our saint's name were a king's gift, given by the greatest king Scotland ever produced, to a man of his own mother's warrior house, in the middle of a war for national survival. Kellechaffe was not bought. It was earned.

Who Was John Son of Neil?

It is tempting to picture John son of Neil as a stranger, a Scottish courtier parachuted onto a Gaelic shore to hold it for a distant king. That picture is wrong, and correcting it is the key to the whole chapter.

John came from Carrick, the earldom occupying south Ayrshire on the Scottish mainland, seated at Turnberry Castle on the Firth of Clyde. Turnberry sits almost directly across the water from Kellechaffe, roughly twenty-five miles as a gull flies, close enough that on a clear day the men of one shore could see the hills of the other. This was not foreign country to him. It was the nearest mainland ground to the land he was given.

And the Carrick earls were not outsiders to Galloway either. The earldom itself had been carved out of the old kingdom of Galloway around 1186, for Duncan, son of Gilbert, Lord of Galloway [27]. Which means that John son of Neil descended from the princely house of Galloway itself. The blood that returned to Loch Ryan under a royal charter in the early 1300s had left that same country only four or five generations earlier. Marjorie, Countess of Carrick, of that house, was Robert the Bruce's mother, and it was through her that the Bruce claimed his own Gaelic descent and his standing among the Gaelic west [6].

So the grant was not a foreign occupation. It was a family appointment, made by a king to his mother's kin, restoring a branch of the old Galloway princely stock to a strategic Galloway shore at the moment when the crossing to Ireland decided whether Bruce lived or died. Galloway in those years was Balliol country and hostile to the Bruce cause; Edward Bruce had to subdue it by force in 1308. Planting trusted kin at the sea door was exactly what a king in that position would do. Whether John himself came over from Ireland to fight, as the family accounts hold, is tradition rather than record, and we mark it so [7]. But the house he came from was Galloway's own.

John's descendants took the name Neilson, son of Neil, and held the land for generations. Around the 1570s they raised the stone tower house that still stands today: Craigcaffie Tower, three storeys of rubble masonry with a barrel-vaulted ground floor, once ringed by a water-filled defensive ditch called a fosse. A carved panel bore the initials and arms of John Neilson and his wife Margaret Strang; a dated stone on the roofline reads 1-5-7, fixing construction

to that decade [5][8]. The tower later passed to the Dalrymples, Earls of Stair, was kept in repair through the centuries, and was restored as a dwelling in the 1980s [5][8]. It is a Category A listed building, Scotland's highest protection. You can drive to it. You can stand in front of it. Seven hundred years after Bruce's charter, the rock of Cathbad still has a tower on it.

And the name of the land shifted with the centuries in a way that tells its own story. Kellechaffe, the Chapel of Cathbad, became Craigcaffie, the Rock of Cathbad, from creag, a steep rock or crag. The holy cell became a fortress name. The saint's ground was now defended ground.

Did Our People Stay?

Here is the question every descendant asks once the charter is understood: when a king handed this ground to his uncle, what happened to the families already living on it? Were the servants of Cathbad turned off their own saint's land?

Almost certainly not, and the reason is worth understanding, because it is how the medieval world actually worked. A grant of this kind transferred lordship, not an emptied estate. John son of Neil did not receive a bare rock above an empty loch. He received the right to collect the rents, the dues, and the military service of the people already farming there. Those people were the asset. A lord with no tenants held nothing but heather. There is no record anywhere of an expulsion from Kellechaffe, and there is no reason a new lord would have wanted one.

But the strongest evidence is not an argument at all. It is the name itself, sitting stubbornly in the same county, century after century, long after the charter. John McCaffe was carrying the king's messages out of that district in 1540 [1]. In 1684 the parish lists of Wigtownshire were still recording McIlhaffie and Mahaffie among the local people [1]. A name built from a specific local saint and fastened to a specific named rock does not reappear in the same small corner of Scotland three and a half centuries later if the people who bore it were driven out and replaced. It reappears because they never left.

So the honest picture is this. The old families of the chapel lands lived on as the older population of the district, under Neilson lordship rather than beside the Neilsons as equals. They were tenants where they had once been the saint's own servants. That is not a romantic outcome, and this book does not pretend otherwise. But they held their ground. Lords came from across the water, castles rose and changed hands, the very language of the country turned over twice, and the servants of Cathbad were still there, still farming above Loch Ryan, still answering to a name no one else in Scotland carried.

If They Were Keepers: A Life Built on Duty

Say plainly first what this section is. No document states that the McIlhaffies of Kellechaffe held their chapel in hereditary keeping. What we have is the shape of the name, a gille surname bound to one obscure saint, standing beside a place named as that saint's chapel, with the family recorded in the same parish for centuries afterward. That is a strong inference. It is not a record, and this book will not pretend otherwise. But the institution it points to is thoroughly documented, and if that is what they were, we can describe their lives with real confidence, because such families are well known to history.

The medieval church did not run on hired staff. It ran on hereditary tenure. A kindred held the church's land, and in exchange that kindred kept the church going, father to son, for as long as the arrangement lasted. In Ireland these families were the airchinneach, the erenagh, and the comarba, the coarb, who was reckoned the successor of the founding saint himself. In Scotland the deòradh held land in return for guarding a saint's relic, and left their office behind as the surname Dewar. These were not obscure arrangements. They were the ordinary machinery of the Gaelic church, and they survived in Ulster until the whole Gaelic order collapsed in the early seventeenth century [37].

The work divided into a handful of duties, and the first of them was the largest. **They farmed the church's land.** Erenaghs were, in the phrase of one seventeenth-century account, hereditary farmers of church lands. Most days of most lives were spent in fields and byres, and the chapel's ground was both their livelihood and their obligation at once [37].

They kept the fabric. Roof, walls, enclosure, burial ground. When the chapel needed repair it was their hands and their money that did it. **They collected and rendered the dues**, taking in the tithes and rents of the church's land, passing the bishop's share up and keeping a portion for their own sustenance; the erenagh paid a yearly rent to his bishop and had a voice in the chapter when revenues were discussed [37]. **They gave hospitality and buried the dead**, feeding and housing travelers and pilgrims, tending the graves. And where a church held a relic, **they guarded it**.

That last duty deserves a moment, because of whose chapel this was. Relics in the Gaelic world were not kept behind glass. They were carried, and they were carried into battle as standards. The most famous of them all is the Cathach of Columba, a psalter borne before the armies of the O'Donnells, and the word cathach means, quite literally, the battler, from the very same root as the name Cathub. Whether any relic of our saint ever existed we do not know and do not claim. But that is the world these families lived in, and the vocabulary of it runs straight through our own name.

As for where such a family stood in the world: not peasants, and not aristocracy, but something with a floor beneath it that ordinary tenants did not have. Erenagh kindreds were a recognized, propertied, hereditary class who **held high social status**, held their land by inheritance rather than at a lord's pleasure, were often literate in Latin in an age when almost no one could read, and were substantial enough to quarrel with bishops over the management of church property and sometimes win [37]. The nearest modern likeness is a long-established farming family with a hereditary public office attached: comfortable rather than rich, respected rather than powerful, the family whose name every soul in the district knew because for two hundred years they were the ones who kept the chapel standing and the graves tended.

Hold on to what that means. Whatever standing such a family had came from a **duty**. Not from a conquest, not from a title handed down by a king, not from land seized. From keeping something sacred, and keeping it so long that the saint's name stopped being his alone and became theirs. Defenders and keepers, in an age that had little use for anyone who was neither.

And there is a thread here that runs the whole length of this book, which any Mahaffey who has ever worked ground will recognize. Whatever else these people were, they were **farmers**. They were farmers above Loch Ryan. They were farmers in Ulster. They were farmers when they came off the ships, and they broke ground on the American frontier, and they farmed the South and the West. Nine centuries, four countries, one occupation. Some inheritances come down through charters. This one came down through hands.

Three words, then, for the people of Craigcaffie, and let each one be weighed rather than simply claimed.

Defenders. Not warriors, which is the easy word and the one every family claims. Defenders, which is the harder claim and the one the evidence actually supports. No Mahaffey stands recorded in a gallowglass company; none does, and the ledger at the back of this book says so plainly. What the record shows instead is a family that held things. They kept a relic and a chapel rather than campaigning for one. They held a shore that was one of the great sea doors between Ireland and Scotland, fought over from the Iron Age forward, and holding is not the same work as raiding. The tower raised on their ground is a defensive building: three storeys of rubble masonry ringed by a water-filled fosse, and no one digs a fosse in order to go conquer someone. When the Crown hunted the Covenanters through Wigtownshire, this family endured it and was still there in the parish lists afterward. And when their own military service finally enters the documents, it enters on the muster rolls of the American Revolution, and in the family's own telling of the frontier, in a cabin burned and rebuilt.

Farmers. This one requires no hedging whatever. Erenaghs were, in the plain phrase of the seventeenth-century record, hereditary farmers of church lands [37]. They worked ground above Loch Ryan, and their descendants worked ground in Ulster, and in Pennsylvania, and across a continent. It is the single most continuous fact in nine hundred years of this family.

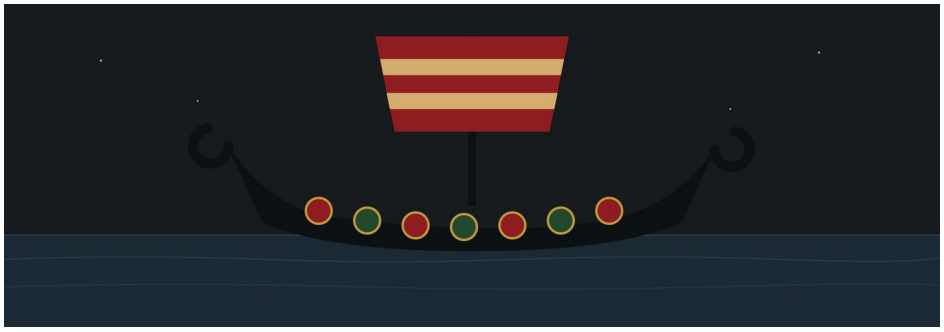
Scholars. Keeping a church meant keeping its accounts, its rents, its boundaries, and its dead. Erenagh kindreds were often literate in Latin in centuries when almost nobody on earth could read at all, and they sat in the chapter when revenues were argued [37]. Whatever else a keeper’s family was, it was a family that could read, in a world that mostly could not.

Defenders, farmers, scholars. A people whose standing came from what they kept rather than from what they took.

The documents do not spell out their tenancy, and we say so plainly. But the name is not tradition. The name is on the map, in the charter, and on your birth certificate, and all three match.

IV. Galloway: Born Among the Foreigner Gaels

There is a temptation, in family histories, to borrow glamour: to imagine an ancestor among the Gallowglass, the legendary Norse-Gaelic mercenaries of the medieval Irish wars. This family does not need to borrow. Here is the fact, and it is better than the fantasy.



The sea road of the Gall-Ghaidheil, the foreigner Gaels, whose name became the word Galloway.

The Gallowglass, in Gaelic gallóglaigh, means "foreign warriors," and the "foreigners" in question were the Gall-Ghaidheil, the "foreigner Gaels": the mixed Norse-Gaelic sea people, part Viking and part Gael, who dominated the Hebrides and the coasts of the Irish Sea after the Viking Age. From the mid-thirteenth century onward, these mailed, axe-bearing professional soldiers crossed from western Scotland into Ireland and became the elite heavy infantry of the Irish kings for three hundred years; the first recorded company arrived

in 1259 as part of a Hebridean princess's dowry to an Irish king [9]. They fought in iron mail with two-handed sparth axes, and they were famous for one thing above all: they did not break.

Now the part that should raise the hair on your arms. The homeland of this family, the province where the name Mahaffey was born, is Galloway. And Galloway is not merely near the world of the foreigner Gaels. Galloway is **named for them**. The very word Galloway comes from the Gaelic i nGall-Gaidhealaib, "among the Gall-Ghaidheil," the land of the foreigner Gaels [10]. The Mahaffeys did not have to hire into the Norse-Gaelic warrior world. The family name was minted inside it. The lords of Galloway and the earls of Carrick, the house that received Kellechaffe from Bruce, intermarried and fought alongside the same island dynasties that bred the Gallowglass companies. When you imagine a chapel-keeper's son on the rock above Loch Ryan watching longships come up the loch, you are not imagining a fantasy. You are describing the neighborhood.

Two points of timing keep this honest, because they are easy to run together. The Gall-Ghàidheil settled Galloway in the ninth and tenth centuries; they first appear by name in Irish records in AD 856. The Gallowglass companies were an export from that same world, sailing the other way, and the first recorded company reached Ireland in 1259 [9][32]. Four centuries separate the two. The family name was formed in Galloway well before the first gallowglass ever shipped out. This family belongs to the society that produced those warriors; the paper claims no ancestor among them.

And a second point, which matters more for understanding who we actually are. The Gall-Ghàidheil arrived as a ruling elite, not as a replacement population. They took the place of the Northumbrians at the top of a country whose farmers, fishermen, and chapel-keepers stayed exactly where they were. What spread through everyone was the language, not the bloodline. So the likeliest reading is not that our people sailed in with the newcomers. It is that they were already on that shore, and took a Gaelic name for themselves because Gaelic was now what the whole peninsula spoke [32]. The name is of the Gaelic age. The people carrying it are almost certainly a great deal older than the name.

A Chronology of the Ground: Nine Thousand Years on One Peninsula

A family story is easier to hold when you can see the ground it stands on. What follows is the sequence of peoples, languages, and names on the Rhins of Galloway, the peninsula that holds Loch Ryan and Craigcaffie. The dates of the

deep past are approximate and the transitions were gradual, as they always are. One pattern runs through the whole of it and is worth carrying as you read: **rulers and languages changed far more often than populations did.** People rarely left. They learned new words and answered to new lords.

c. 12,000 – 4000 BC The First People

Hunters, fishers, and gatherers; the land has no name we know

A single flint tool from Dunragit, seven miles from Craigcaffie, shows human beings passing through this coast as much as fourteen thousand years ago, as the ice let go. By about 7800 BC there were hearths burning here, and around 6800 BC someone built a hut on the edge of a vanished estuary, the earliest known house in southwest Scotland. More than seventeen thousand worked flints came out of that one site. They lived on shellfish and fish from the sea and hunted the woods behind [30].

c. 4000 – 700 BC The Builders

Farmers of the Neolithic and Bronze Age

Farming arrives, and with it monuments. From about 3800 BC a line of great timber posts ran across the landscape at Dunragit toward an artificial hill, part of a ceremonial complex spreading more than two kilometers, which archaeologists have compared in ambition to the ritual centers of Salisbury Plain and Orkney. Timber circles, avenues, and cemeteries follow through the Bronze Age. Whoever these people were, they were numerous, organized, and building things meant to last [30].

c. 700 BC – AD 400 The Novantae

Brythonic speech, kin to early Welsh; the Novantarum Peninsula

The Iron Age people of this peninsula enter written history through Ptolemy’s Geography, around AD 150, which names them the Novantae and fixes them precisely by landmarks still on the map: the Rhins and the Mull of Galloway [28]. They farmed from fortified steadings. And Ptolemy records one of their towns as Rerigonium, standing on the Rerigonius Sinus. That bay is Loch Ryan, whose modern name descends from this ancient one, and the best scholarly candidate for the town is Innermessan, on the loch’s eastern shore, one mile from Craigcaffie. The name is read as "very royal place": the seat of the Novantae kings [29][31]. Rome came to this coast, looked across at Ireland, and never took the peninsula.

c. AD 400 – 600 The Age of Saints

Still Brythonic; British kingdoms, probably Rheged

Christianity reaches this corner of Scotland before it reaches anywhere else in it. Tradition places Ninian’s church at Whithorn, the Candida Casa or White House, at about 397, roughly a century and a half before Columba landed on

Iona, and the Latinus Stone there is the earliest Christian monument in Scotland [33]. Welsh bards would still remember the royal place on Loch Ryan centuries later. This is the world of our own saint: Cathub, son of Fergus, a bishop born about 404, whose death the Chronicon Scotorum places about 555 and whose feast the Irish calendars keep on April 6 [36]. It is the world in which a chapel could be raised to such a man on a rock above the water.

c. 600 – 800 Under Northumbria

Anglian overlords; Cumbric still spoken by the people

The Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria extends its power over Galloway, and Whithorn becomes a Northumbrian bishopric. New lords, new church administration, new language at the top. The farming population of the Rhins does not appear to change.

c. 800 – 1000 The Foreigner Gaels

Gaelic arrives by sea; the land begins to be called Galloway

This is the hinge, and it does not work the way most people assume. Gaelic did not spread into Galloway overland from Argyll. It came off the water, carried by the Gall-Ghàidheil, the "foreigner Gaels," Norse-Gaelic people out of the Hebridean and Dublin world, who first appear in Irish records in AD 856 and who settled here as a ruling elite, replacing the Northumbrians at the top. The Galwegian Gaelic that resulted was closer to Manx than to Highland Gaelic, which tells you which way the ships came. Their name became the name of the country [10][32].

c. 1000 – 1300 Gaelic Galloway

Gaelic is the language of the land; Gall-Ghàidhealaibh

For roughly six centuries, Gaelic is the everyday speech of this peninsula [32]. This is the window in which a name like Mac Gille Chathbhaidh, son of the servant of Cathbad, could be formed at all, because it is a Gaelic construction laid over a Christian landscape that was already six hundred years old. Galloway is ruled by its own lords, Fergus and his heirs, and around 1186 the earldom of Carrick is carved off its northern edge for Duncan, son of Gilbert, Lord of Galloway [27].

c. 1306 – 1329 The Name Enters Writing

Kellechaffe; the Chapel of Cathbad

In a charter of King Robert I, the lands appear as Kellechaffe or Kellechaffy, and are granted to John, son of Neil of Carrick, kin of the king [1][5]. Note what this means: **the land carries the family's name in writing nearly two and a half centuries before any individual bearing it does.** The ground remembered them first.

c. 1370 – 1600 **Scots Displaces Gaelic**
Craigcaffie; the Rock of Cathbad

Under the Douglas lordship, Scots speakers are planted in Galloway and the old language begins to retreat; by about 1600 Galwegian Gaelic is gone [32]. Through that same shift the family surfaces as people rather than place: **John McCaffe, king's messenger, in 1540**, the first individual of the name on record, and probably M'Hivey in 1578 [1]. In the 1570s the Neilsons raise the stone tower that still stands [5].

1600 – 1700 **The Crossing to Ulster**
McIlhaffie, Mahaffie, MacHaffy

From 1609 the Plantation carries Lowland Scots families across the twenty-one miles to Ulster, and the name goes with them; the standard authority on Irish surnames records it as Scottish in origin and numerous in Ulster only from the beginning of this century, first appearing as **MacHaffy in the County Armagh hearth money rolls of 1664** [34]. Back home, the Killing Time falls on Covenanting Galloway, and the Wigtownshire parish lists of 1684 still record McIlhaffie and Mahaffie on the old ground [1].

1700 – 1800 **The Atlantic**
Mahaffey

Branches of the family sail for America, reaching Maryland early and Pennsylvania by 1753, part of the great Ulster-Scots migration [18]. Within a generation the name appears on the muster rolls of the American Revolution [16][19].

1800 – today **The Name Everywhere**
Mahaffey, Mahaffy, Mehaffey, McHaffie, Mahaffie

Roughly nine thousand Americans now carry the surname Mahaffey, and the family is present across the United States and through the Canadian provinces, with the name still common across Northern Ireland [2]. And it never left home: McHaffies remain in Wigtownshire, within sight of the loch, where the tower still stands on the rock of Cathbad.

Dates before the Roman period are archaeological estimates and are given in round figures; the boundaries between these eras were gradual and often invisible to the people living through them. Where a transition is contested among scholars, this chronology follows the mainstream reading and flags the uncertainty in the text.

V. The Blood: The Marker of the Irish Sea Kings

The story so far has been carried by parchment and stone. This chapter is carried by something older: the Y chromosome, passed from father to son, unchanged except for rare mutations, for thousands of years. Y-DNA testing in this family returns the haplogroup R1b-M222, and there are few markers in the entire human family tree with a more dramatic reputation.

M222 is the famous "Northwest Irish and Lowland Scots" signature. Its modern distribution is intensely concentrated in exactly two places: the north and northwest of Ireland, and southwestern Scotland [11][12]. Look at that sentence next to everything you have read above. The DNA map of M222 and the documentary map of the name Mahaffey are the same map: Donegal and Ulster on one shore, Galloway on the other, with the North Channel between them. The blood and the name agree.

In 2006, geneticists at Trinity College Dublin published a landmark study identifying this signature with the Uí Néill, the mightiest royal dynasty of early medieval Ireland, whose name means "descendants of Niall" and whose claimed founder was Niall Noígiallach, Niall of the Nine Hostages, the semi-legendary warlord king of Tara said to have raided Roman Britain and to have brought the young Saint Patrick to Ireland as a captive [11][13][14]. Genetic analysis indicates that the Uí Néill dynasty does trace to a single man who likely carried M222, and the dynasty’s kings, ruling for centuries in a polygamous warrior society, spread that lineage on an enormous scale; millions of men living today carry it [11].

Now the honesty this family owes itself, because the truth here is actually fiercer than the legend. Three caveats are firmly established in the scientific literature. First, no one has ever tested Niall’s remains; his grave is unknown, and some historians doubt the details of his life entirely [14]. Second, the M222 mutation is far older than Niall: modern analyses of the mutation tree place its origin roughly 3,400 years ago, somewhere between about 1400 and 2000 BC, in the Irish Sea region, with some researchers arguing for an origin on the Scottish side [12][15]. Third, it follows that not every M222 man descends from the high king himself; many lines branched off long before he was born [13] [15].

Understand what that actually means. It does not shrink the story. It expands it beyond anything the legend offered. It means the fathers of this line were already living, fighting, and raising sons on the shores of the Irish Sea more than a thousand years before Niall of the Nine Hostages drew breath, before Patrick, before Rome, in the Bronze Age. And when, out of that same ancient stock, one branch rose to become the Uí Néill high kings of Ireland, they rose carrying the same marker this family carries. Whether the kings of Tara are our grandfathers or our cousins, they are blood kin, and the science says so.

The family was not descended from that world. The family was **founding stock** of that world.

VI. The Killing Time and the Crossing to Ulster

The 1684 parish lists in which Black found our name were no ordinary census. They were compiled in Wigtownshire by government order during the era Scottish memory calls the Killing Time, when the Crown hunted the Covenanters, Presbyterian dissenters of the southwest who refused to accept the king's authority over their church, and the lists served the machinery of that persecution. Galloway was the storm center of it. The year after our name was written into those lists, in 1685, two Covenanter women, the Wigtown Martyrs, were tied to stakes on the Solway sands near Wigtown and drowned by the incoming tide for refusing to swear. The McIlhaffies and Mahaffies of the 1684 lists were their neighbors and their fellow parishioners. We do not claim martyrs of our own name, because we have not documented any, and this paper does not invent. But the family stood in that fire, in that decade, in that county, and the faith the family carried out of Scotland, generation after generation, was exactly the faith being hunted: Presbyterian, stubborn, and unbroken [1][16].

Across the seventeenth century, Lowland Scots crossed the twenty miles of the North Channel into Ulster in the tens of thousands, in the Plantation and the migrations that followed. Galloway families could see Ireland from their own hills; for a people whose ancestors had crossed that water in both directions for two thousand years, it was less an emigration than a change of shore. The name went with them. In Ireland, the Mahaffy name settled thickest in County Donegal, in Ulster [2][3], directly across the water from Galloway, in the old heartland of the Uí Néill. The blood, in effect, went home.

There is an irony in this worth pausing on, and it belongs to the whole Ulster-Scots people, not to us alone. The families who carried Presbyterian conviction across that water, and who would be defined for centuries afterward by their separation from Rome, bore names that are, quite literally, professions of devotion to Catholic saints. Gilchrist is the servant of Christ, Gilmore the servant of Mary, MacBride the servant of Brigid, Kilpatrick the servant of Patrick, Gilmartin the servant of Martin. And Mahaffey is the servant of Cathub. Every one of these names was coined centuries before the Reformation, in a world with only one Western church and nothing yet to divide from. The names are older than the argument.

VII. The Great Migration and the American Revolution

Between 1717 and 1775, in five great waves, the Ulster Scots left Ireland for America in one of the formative migrations of American history; estimates run from a quarter of a million people to considerably more, and by the outbreak of the Revolution roughly one third of Pennsylvania was of Ulster-Scottish stock [16][17]. They landed overwhelmingly at Philadelphia and the Delaware ports, pushed west to the frontier, and filled the mountain backcountry from Pennsylvania down the Great Wagon Road to the Carolinas. They were the frontier: land-hungry, Presbyterian, hardened by generations of siege and border war, and famously ungovernable by kings.

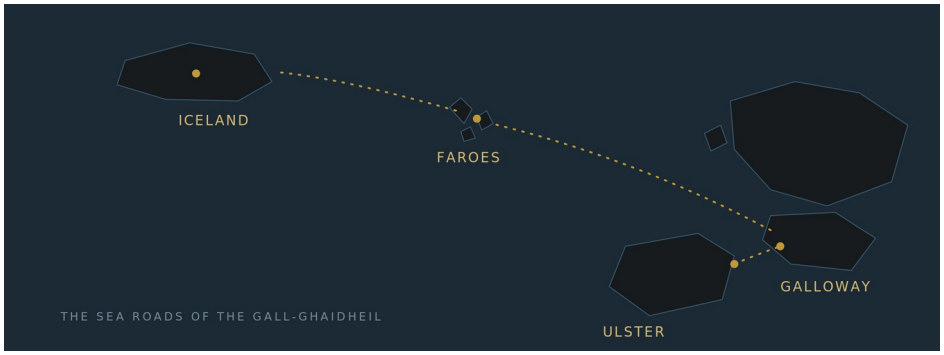
The Mahaffeys were in those ships. The family's own published record, the 1914 book Mahaffey Descendants, compiled from reunions, historical records, and family Bibles, states it plainly: various branches of the Mahaffey family emigrated from the north of Ireland, settling in Maryland at an early date and in Pennsylvania as early as 1753. The book records the Mahaffeys as Scotch-Irish Presbyterians who intermarried on the frontier with fellow Ulster families such as the Lindsays, Allisons, and Hamiltons; one immigrant ancestor arrived before 1771 and settled in East Pennsborough Township, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania [18]. The same book preserves raw frontier memory: a Mahaffey cabin on Lycoming Creek burned in an Indian raid, the family driven off the land, and the man returning in 1780 to rebuild, eventually holding six hundred acres, his house the first ever built between Williamsport and Trout Run [18]. That is not romance. That is a family that would not stay driven off.

When the Revolution came, the Ulster Scots threw themselves into it out of all proportion to their numbers, in the Pennsylvania Line, in the frontier rifle companies, and at battles like Kings Mountain that broke British power in the South; a British officer is famously said to have called the conflict an Irish-Presbyterian rebellion [16][17]. Mahaffey men of the Revolutionary generation appear in the family record and in patriot rolls; individual patriots of the name can be searched and verified today in the Daughters of the American Revolution's free Genealogical Research System [19]. Tracing our own specific chain of fathers back to a named immigrant is the ongoing work of this family's genealogy, and the 1914 book, which is free to read online, is the map for that work [18].

VIII. The Line Today

Follow the whole arc once, end to end. A Bronze Age lineage on the Irish Sea, older than the kings it produced. A warrior-saint's chapel on a rock above Loch Ryan, and a people who called themselves his servants for so long that his name became their name. A king's charter from the hand of Robert the Bruce, payment for war service in the fight that made Scotland a nation. The land of

the foreigner Gaels, the world that forged the Gallowglass. The Killing Time, endured. The crossing to Ulster. The Atlantic. The frontier cabin burned and rebuilt. The Revolution that made the nation this family serves still.



One people, four shores: the Norse-Gaelic world that made Galloway also settled the Faroes and Iceland.

And the sea roads this family came from did not end at Galloway and Ulster. The same mixed Norse and Gaelic world that named Galloway also settled the far North Atlantic. According to the Færeyinga saga, the first Norse settler of the Faroe Islands was Grímur Kamban, a man with a Norse first name and a Gaelic byname, very possibly a Norse-Gael out of the British Isles, and Irish monks may have reached those islands even earlier [20]. Modern genetics has confirmed what his name hints at: roughly 87 percent of Faroese men carry Scandinavian fathers' lines, while roughly 84 percent of Faroese women descend from mothers of Ireland and Scotland, the same Nordic and Celtic blend, forged in the same age of open-boat voyaging, that produced the Gall-Ghaidheil of Galloway [21][22]. Iceland tells the same story. The meaning is simple and stunning: the people who settled the Faroes and Iceland and the people who minted the name Mahaffey are branches of one North Atlantic stock. A Mahaffey on a quay in Tórshavn or a street in Reykjavík is not a stranger in a strange land. He is a cousin come back around the circle.

Across ten centuries this name has been spelled a dozen ways, carried through many countries and even multiple languages. Every son of this line carries the same Y chromosome that kept the chapel lands above Loch Ryan!

The tradition of service never stopped either. From the Revolutionary muster rolls onward, through the world wars and down to the present day, sons and daughters of this name have served the most powerful nation the world has ever known, in its uniforms, on its frontiers, and at the watch stations that keep its lights burning. Keeping watch is the oldest work this family knows.

To the children of this line: your name is not a label. It is a sentence, and it has been under continuous translation for eight hundred years of ink and longer in speech. It says: servant of the battle-prophet, keeper of the chapel lands, kin of

the kings of the Irish Sea, defender of the rock above Loch Ryan. Nobody gave your family this name. Your family built it, defended it, carried it through persecution and across an ocean, and handed it to you intact. Carry it the same way. Somewhere in Galloway there is a rock with a tower on it that remembers why.

The Honest Ledger: What Is Documented, What Is Tradition, What Is Legend

Documented, with sources you can check: the derivation of Machaffie/Mahaffey from Mac Gille Chathbhaidh, "son of the servant of Saint Cathbad" (Black, p. 461); the identification of the saint commemorated at Craigcaffie as Cathub mac Fergusa, rated probable by the University of Glasgow's survey of saints in Scottish place-names, together with that survey's earliest recorded form of the name, Killichaffie in 1329; the commemoration of Cathub, son of Fergus, bishop, on April 6 in the Martyrologies of Tallaght and Donegal, and his death recorded about 555 in the Chronicon Scotorum; the place name Kellechaffe/Craigcaffie in a charter of Robert I's reign; the grant of Kellechaffe by Robert the Bruce to John, son of Neil of Carrick, and the Neilsons' descent claim; Craigcaffie Tower, built in the 1570s and still standing; the family name forms in the Wigtownshire parish lists of 1684, compiled during the Covenanter persecutions; the concentration of R1b-M222 in northwest Ireland and southwest Scotland and its association with the Uí Néill dynasty; the age of M222, far older than Niall; the Ulster Scots Great Migration of 1717 to 1775; Mahaffey settlement in Maryland and in Pennsylvania by 1753, per the 1914 family history; the Norse-Gaelic settlement of the Faroe Islands, and the split ancestry of the Faroese people, Scandinavian on the fathers' side and Gaelic on the mothers' side.

Tradition, plausible and consistent with the evidence but not independently proven: that our specific Mahaffey line descends from the medieval families of the Kellechaffe lands rather than from a parallel Macfie-derived line; that John son of Neil came from Ireland to fight for Bruce around 1309; that the McIlhaffies held their ground as the older population of the district under the Neilsons.

Legend, told as legend: the claim that Cathub lived a hundred and fifty years, doubted even by his early editors; the lost life of the saint, whose biography does not survive; Cathbad the druid of the Ulster Cycle, who shares the saint's name; the deeds of Niall of the Nine Hostages, a real dynasty's half-real founder; and every image of a chainmailed ancestor stepping off a longship, which the geography permits and the record neither confirms nor denies.

Not available, stated plainly: no life or vita of Saint Cathub survives; his see at Achadh-cinn is identified only as probably Aughnakeely in County Antrim, and the foundation there may never have existed; the century in which his cult reached the rock above Loch Ryan cannot be fixed, nor can it be determined whether the chapel was newly founded in the Gaelic centuries or was an older British foundation rededicated; whatever the crag was called before the Gaelic name replaced it is lost beyond recovery, and no chapel structure has been identified at the site; the original charter text (Register of the Great Seal, vol. I, App. II, no. 616) exists in print but we found no free digital copy; Wodrow's Analecta list of Wigtown men and the published 1684 parish lists exist in print and partial scans only; and no documented Mahaffey link to specific Gallowglass companies or specific Covenanter martyrs is claimed, because none has been found.

Glossary: The Old Words, Said Aloud

The old words in this book are worth saying aloud, because they were spoken long before they were written. Pronunciations are approximations for an English speaker; the Gaelic ch is sounded in the back of the throat, as in Scottish loch.

Adomnán (AH-dov-nawn) — abbot of Iona who wrote the Life of Columba around AD 700, recording Columba's royal Uí Néill descent.

armigerous (ar-MIJ-er-us) — a clan legally recognized in Scotland but presently without a chief; Clan Macfie's status, led instead by a Clan Commander.

cath (KAH) — Gaelic, "battle"; the root of the name Cathbad.

Cathbhadh / Cathfaidh (KAH-vugh / KAH-fee) — older Gaelic spellings of Cathbad: the saint of Kellechaffe and, in legend, the druid of the Ulster Cycle. KAH-fee is the sound inside Craigcaffie and Mahaffey.

Cathub mac Fergusa (KAH-hoov mahk FER-goo-sa) — Cathub, son of Fergus: bishop, born about 404 and died about 555, feast day April 6; the saint identified by the University of Glasgow's place-name survey as the probable figure commemorated at Craigcaffie.

airchinneach / comarba (AR-khin-yakh / KOV-ar-ba) — erenagh and coarb: Irish kindreds holding a church's lands in hereditary stewardship, generation after generation.

deòradh (JAW-rugh) — dewar: the hereditary keeper of a saint's relic in Scotland; the origin of the surname Dewar.

Killichaffie (KIL-ih-KAF-ee) — the 1329 form of the name, the chapel-name that the rock-name later displaced.

cill (KEEL) — a chapel or monastic cell; the Kelle- of Kellechaffe.

Cináed mac Ailpín (KIN-ay mahk AL-peen) — Kenneth MacAlpin, the ninth-century king who joined Picts and Gaels into one Scotland; claimed forefather of Siol Alpin.

Colonsay (KOL-un-say) — Hebridean island, historic homeland of Clan Macfie.

Covenanters — Scottish Presbyterians who refused royal control of their church; hunted through the 1680s, hardest in Galloway.

creag (KRAYK) — a steep rock or crag; the Craig- of Craigcaffie.

Cú Chulainn (koo KHUL-in) — boy hero of the Ulster Cycle, whose fate Cathbad the druid foretold.

Dál Riata (dahl REE-ah-tah) — the Gaelic sea kingdom spanning Antrim in Ireland and Argyll in Scotland; the bridge the Gaels crossed into Scotland.

Dùn Eibhinn (doon AY-vin) — the hillfort on Colonsay that served as seat of the Macfie chiefs.

Emain Macha (EH-vin MAH-khah) — royal seat of the Ulster Cycle near Armagh; Cathbad the druid's court in legend.

fosse (FOSS) — a water-filled defensive ditch, as once ringed Craigcaffie Tower.

Færeyinga saga (fair-EY-ing-ah) — the medieval saga of the settlement of the Faroe Islands.

Gall-Ghaidheil (gahl GHEH-yel) — the "foreigner Gaels," the mixed Norse-Gaelic sea people; their name became the word Galloway.

gallóglaigh / Gallowglass (GAL-oh-glee) — "foreign warriors": Norse-Gaelic heavy infantry who served the Irish kings from 1259 into the 1500s; mail coats and two-handed sparth axes.

gille (GEEL-yuh) — servant, devotee; an honorific placing a child under a saint's protection.

Grímur Kamban (GREE-mur KAHM-bahn) — first Norse settler of the Faroes in the saga; Norse first name, Gaelic byname.

haplogroup R1b-M222 — a Y-chromosome lineage marker passed father to son; intensely concentrated in northwest Ireland and southwest Scotland; associated with the Uí Néill.

Kellechaffe (kell-eh-KHAF-ee) — "the Chapel of Cathbad," the family lands beside Loch Ryan; renamed Craigcaffie, "the Rock of Cathbad," as the holy ground became defended ground.

Killing Time — Scottish memory's name for the 1680s persecution of the Covenanters in the southwest.

Mac Dhuibhshíthe (mahk ghuv-HEE-uh) — "son of Duibhshíth" (dark peace); origin of Clan Macfie and the alternate root offered for Mahaffy.

Mac Gille Chathbhaidh (mahk GEEL-yuh KHAH-vee) — "son of the servant of Saint Cathbad"; Black's documented derivation of Machaffie, McIlhaffie, and Mahaffey.

Niall Noígiallach (NEE-al noy-GHEE-al-ukh) — Niall of the Nine Hostages, semi-legendary king of Tara, claimed founder of the Uí Néill.

Register of the Great Seal (RMS) — Scotland's register of royal charters; the index of Robert I's charters preserves the name Kellechaffe.

sept (SEPT) — a family or surname attached to a larger clan.

sett — the exact woven pattern of a tartan.

Siol Alpin (SHEEL AL-pin) — "the seed of Alpin": the kindred of clans, Macfie among them, claiming descent from Cináed mac Ailpín.

sparth axe — the long two-handed axe of the Gallowglass.

Uí Néill (ee NAYL) — "descendants of Niall," the dominant royal dynasty of early medieval Ireland.

Appendix: Records & Registers, Where the Name Is Written

These are the actual registers, archives, and published records in which this family name, its lands, and its saint are written down. Any descendant can pursue them.

COURT OF THE LORD LYON, REGISTER OF CLAN TARTANS. The Clan Macfie tartan, red, green, and gold, recorded August 29, 1991; Mahaffey and Mehaffey stand on the clan's roll of associated names. An association by name, not a shared origin; see the side note in chapter one. Scotland's official heraldic authority [20][21][22].

THE MARTYROLOGY OF TALLAGHT & THE MARTYROLOGY OF DONEGAL. The old Irish calendars of saints. Both commemorate Cathub, son of Fergus, bishop of Achadh-cinn, at April 6; his birth is given as 404 and the Chronicon Scotorum records his death about 555 [36].

COMMEMORATIONS OF SAINTS IN SCOTTISH PLACE-NAMES (UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW). The Leverhulme-funded academic survey of Scottish saint place-names. Its record for Craigcaffie identifies the commemorated saint as Cathub mac Fergusa (rated probable), gives the earliest form Killichaffie in 1329, and identifies the crag as the Fell of Craigcaffie. Searchable free online [35].

REGISTER OF THE GREAT SEAL OF SCOTLAND (RMS), VOL. I, APP. II, NO. 616. The index entry from the reign of Robert I (1306–1329) preserving the lands of Kellechaffe / Kellechaffy; the family name's oldest royal paper trail. Print editions in major research libraries [1].

BRITISH LISTED BUILDINGS & CANMORE SITE 60749. Craigcaffie Tower's Category A listing and Scotland's national monument record: the Bruce grant to John son of Neil, the Neilson descent, the 1570s date stones, the fosse, and the 1996 excavation report [5][8].

WODROW, ANALECTA, VOL. IV. The list of Wigtown men preserving the fullest early form of the name, Mackilhaffy, on which Black's derivation rests. Print, with partial scans in research libraries [1].

PARISH LISTS OF WIGTOWNSHIRE AND MINNIGAFF, 1684. Compiled by government order during the Killing Time; records McHaffine, McIlhaffie, Mahaffie, and Mahalfie. Published 1916; print and partial scans [1].

ACCOUNTS OF THE LORD HIGH TREASURER OF SCOTLAND, VOL. VII. John McCaffe, king's messenger, 1540: a named bearer of the name in crown service [1].

MOORE ET AL., AMERICAN JOURNAL OF HUMAN GENETICS 78 (2006). The Trinity College Dublin study connecting the M222 signature with the Uí Néill; free at PubMed Central, PMC1380239 [13].

ALS ET AL., EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF HUMAN GENETICS 14 (2006). The peer-reviewed study of Faroese ancestry: Scandinavian fathers' lines, Gaelic mothers' lines [24].

MAHAFFEY DESCENDANTS (HARRISBURG, 1914). The family's own published genealogy, 1600–1914: Ulster origins, Maryland and Pennsylvania settlement by 1753, frontier and Revolutionary generations. Free at the Internet Archive [18].

DAR GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH SYSTEM. The Daughters of the American Revolution's free database for verifying individual Mahaffey patriots of the Revolution [19].

Appendix: The Name in All Its Spellings

Before spelling was fixed, clerks wrote what they heard. Anyone searching old records for this family must search for all of these, because the name you are looking for will very often not be spelled the way you spell it. Every form below appears in a document cited in this book.

THE FAMILY NAME. Mac Gille Chathbhaidh (the Gaelic original); Mackilhaffy; McIlhaffie; M'Ilhaffie; M'Haffie; MacHaffie; Machaffie; MacHaffy; McHaffie; McCaffe; MacCaffie; Mahaffie; Mahaffy; Mahaffey; Mehaffey; M'Hivey (probable, 1578).

THE PLACE. Kellechaffe; Kellechaffy; Killichaffie (1329); Cragcaffy (1536); Karkophy (1654); Craigcoffie (1752); Craig Caffie; Craigcaffie (modern).

THE SAINT. Cathbad; Cathbhadh; Cathfaidh; Cathub; Cathur; Cathubius (latinized); and, in Colgan's suggested identification, Fothrath.

A CAUTION. Macfie, MacDuffie, MacPhee and Mac Dhuibhshíthe are NOT forms of this name, whatever the search engines tell you. They belong to the Colonsay clan of separate origin; see the side note in chapter one.

Appendix: How to Continue This Research

This book is a beginning, not a conclusion. What follows is the road map: the actual archives where a descendant can pick up the trail, roughly in the order the family traveled. Several are free. None require a professional.

SCOTLAND: SCOTLANDSPEOPLE. The National Records of Scotland's official site: statutory birth, marriage and death registers from 1855, old parish registers before that, censuses, wills and testaments. Searching indexes is free; viewing images is pay-per-view. This is where Wigtownshire McHaffies are found.

SCOTLAND: CANMORE AND TROVE. The national record of the historic environment. Site 60749 is Craigcaffie Tower; Innermessan has its own record. Free.

SCOTLAND: SAINTS IN SCOTTISH PLACE-NAMES. The University of Glasgow survey. Search "caffie" and the record for the lands appears, with its dated spellings. Free [35].

ULSTER: PRONI. The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, for church registers, valuation records, wills and estate papers. Substantial free online resources.

ULSTER: THE HEARTH MONEY ROLLS AND GRIFFITH'S VALUATION. The 1660s hearth rolls are where MacHaffy first appears in Ireland, in County Armagh [34]. Griffith's Valuation of the mid-1800s lists occupiers of every holding in Ireland and is free online through Ask About Ireland.

AMERICA: THE DAR GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH SYSTEM. Free, and the fastest way to check a Revolutionary ancestor and see the proofs already accepted for him.

AMERICA: MAHAFFEY DESCENDANTS (1914). The family's own published genealogy, free to read at the Internet Archive [18].

THE CHARTER ITSELF. The Register of the Great Seal of Scotland, volume I, appendix II, number 616. In print in major research libraries; we found no free digital copy, and finding one would be a real service to this family.

Y-DNA. A Y-chromosome test with a surname project attached will place a male-line Mahaffey against other testers and against the M222 evidence discussed in chapter five. Results are shared with the project, so read the privacy terms first.

A WORD ON METHOD. Write down where every fact came from, at the moment you find it. Keep what is documented separate from what is remembered. When the two conflict, say so in the text rather than choosing quietly. That single habit is the difference between a family history and a family legend.

Appendix: Visiting the Ground

Everything in this book happened in a landscape you can still stand in. It is a small corner of Scotland and all of it can be seen in a day or two, from a base at Stranraer.

CRAIGCAFFIE TOWER. Just off the A77 north of Stranraer, near Innermessan. The tower is a Category A listed building and a PRIVATE RESIDENCE, restored from a disused ruin in the 1980s [5]. It has been offered as self-catering holiday accommodation, sleeping six, which means a descendant can sleep inside the walls raised on the chapel lands. Availability changes, so search the usual holiday-letting sites by name rather than relying on any address printed here, and never approach the house uninvited. It is someone's home.

THE FELL OF CRAIGCAFFIE. The hill behind the tower, and the craig of the name itself, identified as such by the Glasgow place-name survey [35]. Visible from the road.

LOCH RYAN AND INNERMESSAN. The sea loch is the Rerigonius Sinus of Ptolemy, and Innermessan, a mile from the tower, is the leading candidate for Rerigonium, the royal place of the Novantae [29][31]. Stand on the shore and you are looking at the water our people watched for two thousand years.

STRANRAER AND THE RHINS. The town at the head of the loch; the peninsula beyond it is the Novantarum Cheronesus, still called the Rhins.

WHITHORN. Forty minutes southeast. Ninian's Candida Casa, the earliest Christian foundation in Scotland, with the Latinus Stone in the museum [33]. This is the church that made the whole religious world our name comes from.

WIGTOWN. The county town, now Scotland's National Book Town, where the 1684 parish lists that record our name were compiled, and where the Covenanter martyrs are memorialized [1].

FURTHER AFIELD. Turnberry in Carrick, seat of the earls, an hour north; Dunragit, seven miles east, where the Mesolithic house and the Neolithic complex were excavated [30]; and, twenty-one miles across the water, the Antrim coast.

Sources

1. George F. Black, The Surnames of Scotland (New York Public Library, 1946), p. 461, entry MACCAFFIE, MACHAFFIE. Full entry transcribed at: https://homepages.rootsweb.com/~scottish/McHaffie&rel-sub3.html

2. Wikipedia, "Mahaffey" (surname origin, Clan Macfie sept, Donegal concentration): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahaffey

3. Wikipedia, "Macfie" (Mac Dhuibhshíthe derivation, earliest record 1296): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macfie

4. Family research on the Teroy broch adjoining the Kellechaffe lands, citing H. M. Chadwick, Early Scotland (Cambridge, 1949): https://www.genealogy.com/forum/surnames/topics/mchaffie/60/

5. British Listed Buildings, "Craigcaffie Tower" (Category A), including the Bruce grant, the Neilson descent, the 1570s date stones, and the fosse: https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/200342575-craigcaffie-tower-stranraer-and-the-rhins-ward

6. Wikipedia, "Robert the Bruce" (Earl of Carrick, maternal descent through Marjorie, Countess of Carrick): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_the_Bruce

7. McHaffie family research forum, citing an index of the charters of Robert I for the c. 1309 grant of Kellechaffe to John, son of Neil of Carrick: https://www.genealogy.com/forum/surnames/topics/mchaffie/60/

8. Canmore, National Record of the Historic Environment (Historic Environment Scotland), "Craigcaffie Tower," site 60749, with RCAHMS inventory references and the 1996 excavation report: https://canmore.org.uk/site/60749/craigcaffie-tower

9. Wikipedia, "Gallowglass" (gallóglaigh, Norse-Gaelic origin, first record 1259, arms and role): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gallowglass

10. Wikipedia, "Galloway" (etymology from the Gall-Ghaidheil, the "foreigner Gaels"): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galloway

11. 23andMe haplogroup report, R-M222 (Uí Néill association, Niall of the Nine Hostages, spread of the lineage): https://discover.23andme.com/haplogroup/R1b1a2a1a2c1a1a1a1-paternal

12. FamilyTreeDNA R-M222 Haplogroup Project, background pages ("The haplogroup existed long before Niall"): https://www.familytreedna.com/groups/r-1b-1c-7/about/background

13. Moore, McEvoy, Cape, Simms, and Bradley, "A Y-Chromosome Signature of Hegemony in Gaelic Ireland," American Journal of Human Genetics 78 (2006). The original Trinity College Dublin study; available free through PubMed Central, article PMC1380239.

14. Wikipedia, "Niall of the Nine Hostages" (dating, historicity debates, Uí Néill): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niall_of_the_Nine_Hostages

15. W. Howard, "A Dated Phylogenetic Tree of M222 SNP Haplotypes" (origin of M222 estimated between 1400 and 2000 BC, before Niall): https://www.wwjohnston.net/famhist/howard-R-M222.pdf

16. Discover Ulster-Scots, "Patriots, Pioneers and Presidents" (migration waves, Revolutionary service): https://discoverulsterscots.com/emigration-influence/america/ulster-scots-america/patriots-pioneers-and-presidents

17. James G. Leyburn’s and related accounts of the Great Migration, 1717 to 1775, summarized with sources at: https://homepages.rootsweb.com/~mcclell2/homepage/migrate.htm

18. Mahaffey Descendants: Sketch of Reunions, Historical Records, and Biographical Genealogy of Mahaffey Descendants, 1600-1914 (Harrisburg, 1914). Free full text at the Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/mahaffeydescenda00davi

19. Daughters of the American Revolution, Genealogical Research System (search the surname Mahaffey in the Ancestor database): https://services.dar.org/Public/DAR_Research/search/

20. Wikipedia, "Viking Age in the Faroe Islands" (Grímur Kamban, his Gaelic byname, possible Norse-Gael origin, and the earlier Irish monks): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viking_Age_in_the_Faroe_Islands

21. Als et al., "Highly discrepant proportions of female and male Scandinavian and British Isles ancestry within the isolated population of the Faroe Islands," European Journal of Human Genetics 14 (2006): https://www.nature.com/articles/5201578

22. Arctic Portal, "Faroe Islands" (summary of the genetic findings: about 87 percent Scandinavian male ancestry, about 84 percent Celtic female ancestry): https://arcticportal.org/education/quick-facts/the-arctic/3629-faroe-islands

23. Wikipedia, "Clan Macfie" (armigerous clan, Colonsay, Dùn Eibhinn, Keepers of the Records of the Isles, last chief Malcolm Macfie d. 1623, revived 1981): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clan_Macfie

24. Clan Macfie Australia, "Clan Macfie Today" (tartan recorded with the Court of the Lord Lyon, August 29, 1991; crest; plant badge; roll of associated names): https://clanmacfie.com.au/clantoday

25. Clan histories of Macfie (Siol Alpin tradition, tartan first recorded 1906, names associated with the clan including Mahaffey and Mehaffey): https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Space:Clan_MacFie

26. FamilyTreeDNA McDuff surname project (project results showing that similar-sounding surname groups in this family of names are genetically distinct families, not one clan): https://www.familytreedna.com/groups/mcduff/about

27. Wikipedia, "Carrick, Scotland" and "Earl of Carrick" (the earldom carved from Galloway c. 1186 for Duncan, son of Gilbert, Lord of Galloway; seat at Turnberry): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carrick,_Scotland

28. Wikipedia, "Novantae" (the Iron Age people of Galloway and Carrick, recorded in Ptolemy’s Geography c. AD 150; Rispain Camp; debated ethnicity): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novantae

29. Mike McCarthy, "Rerigonium: a lost ‘city’ of the Novantae," Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 134 (2004), pp. 119-129. The case for Innermessan on Loch Ryan as the site: http://soas.is.ed.ac.uk/index.php/psas/article/view/9601

30. GUARD Archaeology, "Dunragit: the prehistoric heart of Galloway" (Mesolithic house c. 6800 BC, hearths c. 7800 BC, Neolithic post alignments c. 3800 BC, and an Upper Palaeolithic tool): https://www.guard-archaeology.co.uk/GALNews/?p=407

31. Canmore / trove.scot, "Innermessan" (site record noting the identification with Ptolemy’s Rerigonium on the Rerigonius Sinus, the modern Loch Ryan): https://www.trove.scot/place/60782

32. Alistair Livingstone, "The Expansion and Contraction of Gaelic in Galloway" (Gaelic introduced by Gall-Ghàidheil and Hiberno-Norse settlers, dominant 10th to 16th centuries, extinct by about 1600): https://www.academia.edu/454333/The_Expansion_and_Contraction_of_Gaelic_in_Galloway

33. The Whithorn Trust and Wikipedia, "Candida Casa" (Ninian's church at Whithorn, traditionally c. 397, preceding Iona by roughly 150 years; the Latinus Stone): https://www.whithorn.com/origins/

34. Edward MacLysaght, Supplement to Irish Families (1964) and A Guide to Irish Names (1964), entry Mahaffy: Scottish in origin, numerous in Ulster only since the beginning of the seventeenth century, occurring as MacHaffy in the County Armagh hearth money rolls of 1664. Transcribed at: https://forebears.io/surnames/mahaffy

35. "Commemorations of Saints in Scottish Place-Names" (University of Glasgow, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, 2010-13), record for Craigcaffie, Wigtownshire: identifies the commemorated saint as Cathub mac Fergusa, rated probable; gives the earliest form Killichaffie (1329) and the later forms Cragcaffy (1536), Karkophy (1654) and Craigcoffie (1752); and identifies the crag as the Fell of Craigcaffie: https://saintsplaces.gla.ac.uk/place.php?id=1371085701

36. The Martyrology of Tallaght and the Martyrology of Donegal, entries at April 6 for Cathub / Cathur, son of Fergus, bishop of Achadh-cinn, birth given as 404 and death as 555 (the latter from the Chronicon Scotorum), the reported lifespan of 150 years, the identification of Achadh-cinn as probably Aughnakeely in the barony of Kilconway, County Antrim, John Colgan's suggested identification with the priest Fothrath or Cathbad of Fothrat, and O'Hanlon's rejection of Colgan's claim that Cathub was a disciple of Saint Patrick; as compiled and translated by Canon John O'Hanlon and transcribed at: http://www.omniumsanctorumhiberniae.com/2014/04/saint-cathur-or-cathub-bishop-of.html

37. On erenaghs, coarbs, and hereditary church tenure: Wikipedia, "Erenagh" (airchinnech; receipt of tithes and rents, maintenance of church property, termon lands, yearly rent to the bishop, voice in the chapter, hereditary succession within families), and the summary of erenagh social standing, literacy, and the survival of the office to the collapse of the Gaelic order in the early seventeenth century at Wikipedia, "McInerney". For the coarb as reckoned successor of the founding saint, and erenaghs as hereditary farmers of church lands, see the scholarship surveyed in "Erenaghs and Termonlands: Another Early Seventeenth-Century Account" (2002): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erenagh

A note on sources: web addresses were live as of August 2026. Where a source is a family compilation or a community research page rather than an academic publication, it is cited as exactly that, and the underlying primary records it names (the Register of the Great Seal, Wodrow's Analecta, the 1684 parish lists) are identified so that any descendant can pursue them.